

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH ABC NEWS
ON BOARD THE USS EISENHOWER
JUNE 26, 1994

Q: Do you think the women experiment here is really working, or has it gone past an experiment?

A: It's past the experiment stage. It's working and it's working well. I talked with several of the women last night. First of all, they believed that they were being regarded by the job they did, not by their gender.

One of them made a very interesting comment to me. She said she stood on the bridge of this ship and looked all around this carrier, looked out at the (inaudible), looked out at the Aegis ships there and said, "I can aspire to command any ship that I see." They believe that, and that's a fact.

Q: What about all the problems that we've heard about over the years as to why this couldn't happen? Why it wasn't going to work?

A: Aboard a large ship like this aircraft carrier, you can accommodate the physical separation that needs to be accommodated, the living quarters. That has been done. It took a little time to modify the ship that way, but it has been done. It's still a problem aboard a submarine. We haven't figured out how to do that without (inaudible). But there's no reason why it cannot be done, and indeed it will be done aboard all of the surface ships in the Navy.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: I haven't seen that, and I've looked very hard for it. I've talked to both men and women who are experiencing the integration. I see no evidence of any problem that can't just be ironed out or worked out.

One of the other women I talked to last night told me she'd been in the Navy for 19 years. This was the first time she'd been able to do what she'd always wanted to do, to serve on-board a warship. She wanted to be able to tell her grandchildren she was a sailor, and as a sailor, she took ships to sea.

Q: Mr. Perry, do you plan to do a followup study on just how this works? The women that have come aboard, as you say, have been working very hard for many years. They stand out here to be the cream of the crop. What's going to happen when the next generation of women (inaudible)?

A: That's a very good point. Nearly all of the women on board here are women that have been in the Navy a number of years, they're very experienced. Some of them have been on non-combatant ships. This has the best opportunity for working and working smoothly. So it's going to require a lot of followup, a lot of careful attention. We will give it that careful attention. But this is going to work, and it's going to work not only because it's the right thing to do, but because we're putting the right kind of management [into it].

Q: Are any of the integration lessons being learned here instructive for any of the other services still wrestling with the problem of women in combat?

A: I think there are a few generic lessons. When a task is gender insensitive, it ought to be treated that way. There are other tasks that are not gender sensitive but require certain bodily skills and bodily functions which you find more often in men than in women. You have to make appropriate adjustments for those types of tasks.

But generally speaking, the problem of being on-board a Navy ship are quite different in detail than problems of being in the Army or being in the Air Force. This Navy is stepping out smartly to meet those problems, and I'm very impressed about what I see here.

Q: Do you think this would have happened without Tailhook?

A: Yes, I really do. This was an idea whose time has come. We are pursuing it that way.

Q: Is there any change in your comment about Bosnia? Are you (inaudible), and you might decided to send a peacekeeping force into Bosnia?

A: Our conditions for sending a peacekeeping force into Bosnia remain the same as they've been for months, which is that first of all, there must be a peace agreement among the combatants on the ground. We are closer, I think, to that peace agreement today than we were a few months ago, and in that sense, it's changed. The second condition we put on it is that it's got to be a peacekeeping

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force under NATO operational control. The third is, of course, we have to consult with Congress.

All of those conditions remain the same. I think we are probably closer to meeting those conditions today than we were several months ago. There's been progress made in the peacekeeping talks.

Press: Thank you.

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